Unit .30

Session .02

Confronted by the Gospel of Jesus

Scripture

Acts 9:3-20

3 As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light
from heaven suddenly flashed around him. **4** Falling to
the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul,
why are you persecuting me?" **5** "Who are you, Lord?"
Saul said. "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting," he
replied. **6** "But get up and go into the city, and you
will be told what you must do." **7** The men who were
traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound
but seeing no one. **8** Saul got up from the ground, and
though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So
they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus.
9 He was unable to see for three days and did not
eat or drink. **10** There was a disciple in Damascus
named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision,
"Ananias." "Here I am, Lord," he replied. **11** "Get up
and go to the street called Straight," the Lord said to
him, "to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from
Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. **12** In a
vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in
and placing his hands on him so that he may regain
his sight." **13** "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard
from many people about this man, how much harm
he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. **14** And he
has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all
who call on your name." **15** But the Lord said to him,
"Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take
my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. **16** I will
show him how much he must suffer for my name."
17 Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his
hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus,
who appeared to you on the road you were traveling,
has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be
filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** At once something
like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight.
Then he got up and was baptized. **19** And after taking
some food, he regained his strength. Saul was with the
disciples in Damascus for some time. **20** Immediately
he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: "He is
the Son of God."

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus speaks clearly through His Word, calling all people to join Him in His mission.

Option 1

On your whiteboard, set up a tournament bracket for eight teams. (If you think your kids can be quick, or if you have a very large group, you could do sixteen.) The tournament will be based on who has the best origin story. Each team will decide on a superhero or other figure whom they think has the greatest origin story (e.g., Iron Man makes a suit; Spider-Man gets bitten by a radioactive spider; Superman is from another planet). Don't let them pick Jesus. He'd win everything. If two teams choose the same superhero, have them flip a coin; the losing team has to pick a different origin story.

Write down the eight characters' names in the brackets. Then, proceed to have a large-group vote on which character should advance to the next round; the person with the most unique origin story advances. Give each team thirty seconds maximum to defend their person's origin story. Keep going and eliminating until you have a final winner.

Share with your students that today's lesson will give us insight into the origin story of the apostle Paul. See if they can spot any parallels between the origin stories they chose and Paul's (for example, maybe, their figure had a change from evil to good, or maybe Paul, like Batman, had great power already but turned it to good).

Option 2

Break students into small groups to make skits. Have the groups count off between 1 and 2. All the 1s will make a skit with a sad ending; all the 2s will make a skit with a happy ending. All groups have to come up with a skit revolving around some kind of confrontation. The confrontation could be between just about anybody: siblings, friends, coach and athlete, whomever. The 1 groups will show the confrontation ending badly; the 2 groups will show the confrontation ending well.

Let students prepare their skits and then show them. Debrief by asking what similarities they saw across the confrontations with sad endings. What sin patterns did they notice? In the confrontations with happy endings, why did they turn out better? How did people change in the happy endings and not change in the sad endings? In today's lesson, we'll see someone get confronted by the Savior, Jesus Christ. Make whatever connections you can between the happy endings (or maybe even the sad endings) and what will happen to Saul in Acts 9.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 9:3-9.

Acts 9 is a snapshot of how the power of heaven prevails over the powers of earth in order to guide human history in ways that serve God's glory. Saul had gained favor among the Jewish religious rulers, especially for his bold threats against the church. But when the time was right, a sudden light from heaven and the voice of the risen Savior forever changed Saul's life. Jesus called the one persecuting Him to believe and to live in faith and obedience moving forward.

For a time, the Lord allowed Saul to live arrogantly, approving of the stoning of Stephen (who was the first Christian martyr), and to wreak havoc upon the church through violence. Jesus' appearance to Saul may seem sudden to us, but this encounter was long known and arranged by God Himself. According to God's perfect plan, Jesus called Saul to believe in and obey the resurrected Savior.

In response to the bright, blinding light, Saul fell to the ground in humility and fear. Every encounter with Christ demands that we recognize who is really in charge. Saul, who was high in the eyes of men, was brought low before the power of Jesus. The wisdom of the Scriptures teaches that we should humble ourselves to God's calling.

Saul did not understand that his terrorizing the young church was an act of persecution against the Messiah. He didn't know that Jesus was that Messiah. But Jesus clarified that—"I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting" (v. 5). Jesus could have confronted Saul by judgment. Instead, He confronted Saul with grace, saving Saul and inviting him to join His mission.

When Saul heard the Lord's voice and recognized Jesus' authority, he knew that he had to obey. Knowing the Lord's voice is central to the Christian life. When we read Scripture, it is God's way of speaking to us. We must listen to His Words, and we must obey. When we do, God will bless us and use us to bless others.

- **When have you thought that someone may be beyond God using them for His mission?**
- **How has God communicated to you in a clear and powerful way through His Word?**

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 88, DDG)

Calling

The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus speaks clearly through His Word, calling all people to join Him in His mission.

Acts 9

"At least two things burst on Saul's conscience. First, Jesus Christ was alive! Verse 17 of our text, as well as 1 Corinthians 15:8, indicates that Saul actually saw Christ. Later he would present this vision as part of his apostolic credentials. Everything in Saul's life had opposed this, but now he knew Christ was alive. … Second, Saul now knew he was not merely attacking those belonging to the Way—he was persecuting Christ. He now understood the spiritual unity between the Savior and the saints. This truth was at once terrible and wonderful, but Saul was at first overwhelmed by its terror. While Saul lay prostrate, the voice instructed him, 'Rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do' (v. 6). Luke goes on to describe the situation. ... The great hunter who was going to wreak havoc on the Damascus church entered Damascus led by the hand—blind, weak, impotent. Saul was frightened and in despair. This was the midnight of his soul. His physical blindness paralleled his spiritual sightlessness. Though he was blind, he had seen Christ, and as he saw Christ he also saw himself for the first time. His life was utterly wrong. He was a criminal before God. As he wrote later, 'Nothing good dwells in me' (Romans 7:18). As Christ's enemy, he had drawn blood, and now darkness was everywhere, especially within his own soul. The hunter had been hunted down. There was no escape."[1]

In Defense (p. 90, DDG)

Some people are prone to say things like, "God told me," or, "God said." We need to be very careful when we hear (or especially use!) this kind of language. The Bible teaches that God spoke through creation (Rom. 1:20), revealing Himself—His divine nature and eternal power—such that people can't deny His existence. Further, God spoke through the prophets, revealing a clearer picture of Himself, as well as His expectations for how we are to live to reflect His nature (Heb. 1:1). Finally, God gave us the clearest picture of Himself in the person of Jesus—the perfect Word of God (Heb. 1:2; John 1:1-4,14). God has spoken definitively and finally through Jesus. Therefore, sometimes when people say, "God said," they're elevating their thoughts, impressions, or convictions to a level very similar to the special revelation of God—the Scriptures. God certainly still speaks uniquely to people through the Holy Spirit, but the Bible is complete, and God no longer speaks in an authoritative God-said manner as He did through Scripture.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 9:10-16.

As He accomplishes His plan to reach the world with the gospel, God often works in ways we would never expect. Saul was a dedicated Pharisee who would now count his background and pedigree as trash in comparison to knowing the gospel he would proclaim (Phil. 3:8). But first, the Lord would use the people Saul had persecuted to be his teachers and supporters.

God called Saul into Christian service in two stages: first through the appearance of Jesus, and then through the work of His church. Saul knew instructions were coming in Damascus (Acts 9:6), but God gave the details of Saul's calling to Ananias. God wanted Ananias to know the potential of God's work through the rebel Saul before Saul could even conceive of the unimaginable future that awaited him.

- **What are some unexpected ways you have seen God work in your life or the lives of others?**

It was surely frightening for Ananias to go to a man who had previously murdered Christians. Nonetheless, he obeyed, and God used Ananias to impact the life and mission of Saul (who is called Paul). This is an encouragement for us—when we obey, God often will use us to reach even those who are far from God.

- **Why are we quick to discount some people God might otherwise use in a powerful way?**

Read Acts 9:17-20.

We have to wonder if Ananias had any idea of how God would use him to change the course of history. His obedience to the strange call of God would catapult the mission to the Gentiles, continuing through the ages to reach us today. This seemingly small step of faith blessed a man, the church, and the world. Every Christian who obeys the call of God can be like Ananias. Through our faithful obedience, we change the world—in small ways and, for those we directly impact, in huge ways.

In faith, Ananias left the safety of his home and entered the house God sent him to. Ananias called Saul, the one who terrorized the church, "brother"! These two people had little in common, except that the Lord Jesus had called both of them into His grace and salvation. Only the gospel can do this. Before this time, the Jewish believers did not understand God's desire to reach the unreachable. So in His wise care, God changed the most unreachable among them—Saul (1 Tim. 1:12-17). When God does the surprising among us, He expects us to join in with Him in advancing the kingdom work. When we show God's love and grace to the lost, He uses us to proclaim the gospel to the world.

- **How have you seen God take enemies (or those who didn't see eye to eye) and make them brothers and sisters in Christ?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus speaks clearly through His Word, calling all people to join Him in His mission.

Acts 9

"Those traveling with Saul finally gained their composure and led Saul by the hand into Damascus, where an amazing thing happened. The hunted do not usually minister to the hunter. Normally that would be as crazy as Peter Rabbit caring for Mr. McGregor or Golda Meir nursing Adolf Eichmann. But this is exactly what happened in Saul's case. ... This believer's fears were understandable, but the Lord's answer was good enough for him: Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. (vv. 15, 16) Spiritual usefulness and honor go hand in hand with suffering. Both were part of the Hunter's plan for Saul—and for us. Ananias probably left his house with trepidation, but to his credit he obeyed. And as had happened with Philip the deacon, Ananias' obedience made him party to a great work of God."[2]

Activity

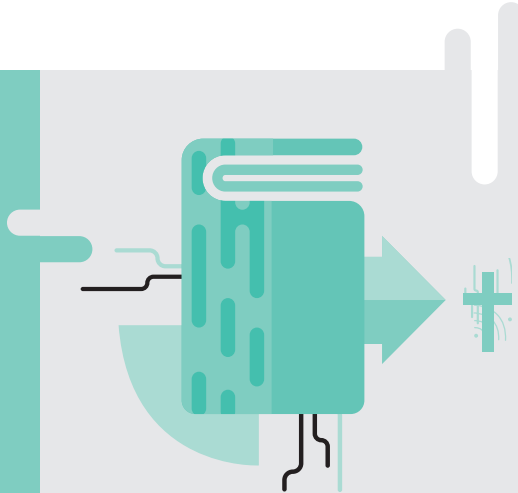
Break your students into small groups (maximum of three students per group). Give each group an index card and a writing utensil to write three things:

- A falsehood that a non-Christian might believe about him- or herself (e.g., that they are worthless, or that they are the best thing ever, or that they are perfect, or that they are beyond saving)
- Something a non-Christian might consider a great vocation or accomplishment (e.g., owning their own company, releasing a No. 1-on-the-charts album, finding a scientific breakthrough)
- A great team or group a non-Christian might want to join (could be as out there as the Justice League or more realistically a futbol club).

Redistribute the cards among the groups. The group should now decide to use one of the three things on their new card as a way to address a non-believer; they should share what they would say to the non-believer (or, if they wish, they could act it out in a role-play). The idea is to practice using today's lesson to show how in all respects, the Christian has it "even better" than the best non-Christian can have. Use this exercise to practice how we can both connect with and confront non-believers to call them to Jesus, just as Saul was called to Jesus.

(p. 89, DDG) Christ Connection

The conversion and calling of Saul is a demonstration of God's power to save. Through an encounter with the crucified and risen Jesus, this once-hardened persecutor of God's people began his journey to becoming perhaps the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Only the gospel can transform a public opponent of Christ into a fervent witness to His salvation.



CONFRONTED BY THE GOSPEL

Acts 9:3-20

CONFRONTED BY THE GOSPEL

Jesus speaks clearly through His Word, calling all people to join Him in His mission.

JESUS CONNECTION

The conversion and calling of Saul is a demonstration of God's power to save. Saul's encounter with Jesus transformed him from a hard-hearted persecutor of Jesus' followers into one of the greatest missionaries in the world. Only the gospel can transform a public opponent of Christ into a sincere witness to His salvation.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

SUBMISSION – Choosing to be under the authority of others.

HEAD

How did Saul respond to his encounter with Jesus?

Why was Ananias afraid to do what God said? What happened when Ananias followed God's instructions?

HEART

Jesus revealed Himself to Saul on the road. How did getting an accurate view of Jesus change Saul's attitude from proud and defiant to humble and submitted?

Ananias did not want to obey God because he was afraid of Saul. How does fear keep us from submitting to our calling or to those in charge of us?

HANDS

We often think showing submission makes us weak, but God wants us to submit to Him first and then to the authorities He's put over us—unless they are asking us to go against God's way and God's Word. In the situations below, how could you submit to God first in your response?

- The bus driver tells you to be quiet or he'll write you up, but another student was the one talking
- A popular girl makes her friends do embarrassing things in order to sit with her at lunch
- The coach requires 30 burpees for anyone who is late or disrespectful in practice or games
- Your older sister says you have to clean the bathrooms before she gets home